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## **Salisbury's Project SAFE Neighborhoods Program to Begin Sixth Year of Dedicated Efforts in Providing Safer Community**

*Local team is part of nationwide commitment dedicated to reducing gun crime in America*

Salisbury, NC\_June 2 2008 – Members of Salisbury's Project SAFE Neighborhoods (PSN) Task Force are committed to providing a safer Salisbury/Rowan community. This summer, marks the beginning of the team's sixth year in aggressively identifying and addressing individuals involved in past violent crimes. Through a structured community intervention session, offenders are first notified by volunteer community members that resources are available to assist in living a life without crime. Secondly police notify the offenders that if they do not heed this warning, further crimes on their behalf will deliver prosecution to the fullest extent of the law.

Salisbury Deputy Police Chief Rory Collins serves as the director of the local Project SAFE program. Collins offers, "The Project SAFE program is part of a federally backed initiative to reduce gun violence by utilizing federal, state and local resource to vigorously prosecute repeat violent and group offenders that utilize guns in committing crimes." Project SAFE funding supports hiring of new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, law enforcement training, provisions for training and distribution of gun lock safety kits. In addition, as a deterrent to juvenile gun crime and gang activity, community outreach sessions and family fun days are developed and promoted to support the family unit. Chief Collins adds, "To date, Salisbury has held nine community intervention notification sessions with over 125 individual offenders notified to heed this warning and change their criminal ways." Project SAFE team members meet monthly to receive committee updates and to plan prevention and intervention methods.

Salisbury held its first PSN notification meeting in November 2003 and of the 19 violent offenders identified by local probation officers, all were in attendance. Of the nineteen in attendance, nine asked for help from the community. The resources available include providing help toward a general equivalency diploma, job readiness training, employment, alcohol or drug treatment, counseling, anger management, mentoring and transportation. These resources are made available through Project SAFE to those individuals (only) that have been notified through the program. Project SAFE task force facilitator Henry Diggs states, "If the community can't help meet some of these basic needs, it will live with a cycle of repeat offenders."

Deputy Chief Collins reiterates, "Project SAFE is not an offer to forgive, but a way for offenders to turn their lives around. For the offenders who continue to commit acts of violence, police and prosecutors promise those in the notification meetings that they will come down hard on them in state and federal court and get them off the streets for a long time." A former Chief District Court Judge in Rowan County, United States Attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina, Anna Mills Wagoner adds, "A decrease in gun crime and citizen complaints are exactly the results that we are striving for ... safer streets, neighborhoods and front porches for all to enjoy."

Mayor Susan Kluttz was involved in the inception of the program here in 2003 and has remained an active task force member. Kluttz shares, "The Project SAFE task force is comprised of loyal citizens, non-profit, business and faith community leaders, probation, parole and juvenile justice representatives and law enforcement officials. These dedicated individuals volunteer their time and energy to help provide a safer Salisbury-Rowan community for all." Speaking on behalf of the Salisbury City Council, Mayor Kluttz adds, "We are sincerely grateful to these dedicated individuals for their devotion to reducing gun crime and violence in our neighborhoods."

In addition to notifications, Project SAFE Salisbury offers educational outreach sessions to the community. Programs, designed specifically for ages, kindergarten to adult, are implemented by team volunteers striving to create awareness and preserve the safety of their community. High energy children's sessions include music and exercise with appearances by "McGruff" the Crime Dog and "Chipper" the Salisbury Parks & Recreation Squirrel. Young attendees receive refreshments, Salisbury SAFE Kids Gun Safety Workbooks and learn through repetition, the four steps to take when they see a gun. In addition, the children receive instruction on how to resist gang activity participation, refusing drugs and dealing with conflicts without resorting to violence. The program offers a strong marriage of volunteers and the local Police Department. Bullet-proof vest and K-9 demonstrations offer the children insight into the life of a police officer with hopes that children will view the Police as an ally in time of need.

In response to recent signs of possible gang activity within the City, Salisbury Police Department's Gang Unit offers educational awareness sessions on gang action. In support of this outreach, Project SAFE Salisbury has designed and distributes complimentary educational guides for parents and concerned citizens regarding gang activity and awareness. Further gang information can be accessed on the Project SAFE Salisbury website at <http://www.salisburync.gov/projectsafe/safesalisbury.htm>. In addition, the site offers an interactive children's page with coloring projects, smart decision making and gun safety tips. To request complimentary children's activity workbooks, adult gang awareness booklets or to receive more information regarding Project SAFE Salisbury, please contact Project SAFE Resource Coordinator Teresa Vinson at 704-638-2175.

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